

# MENNONITE HISTORICAL BULLETIN

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## Biography of N. E. Roth (1870-1939)

BY THE LATE EZRA STAUFFER

Nicholas Edward Roth was born August 15, 1870 near Flanagan, in Livingston Co., Ill., the second son of Christian L., and Katie (Zehr) Roth.

When a youth of 14 he moved with his parents to Seward Co., Nebr., where they located on a farm west of Milford. He accepted Christ as his Saviour and was baptized at the East Fairview Amish Mennonite Church in September, 1887. He served the East Fairview Church as Sunday-school superintendent for 3 years; also as a S.S. teacher at various times. On January 18, 1891, he was united in marriage to Amanda Bender, the youngest child of David B. and Lydia (Miller) Bender.

In April, 1896, Bro. Roth was ordained to the office of deacon, by lot; 7 brethren being in the lot. He was ordained by Bishop Joseph Schlegel to serve the East Fairview congregation.

In April, 1902, Bro. Roth was ordained to the office of minister by the unanimous consent of the East and West Fairview congregations, by Bishop Joseph Schlegel to serve both the East and West Fairview congregations. Bro. Roth had, however, served in the capacity of preaching in both congregations previous to this ordination, while a deacon.

Bro. Roth served in a number of congregations of the Western Amish Mennonite Conference district, as minister after he had been ordained to that office, at different times holding meetings in various congregations, and was largely instrumental in the origin of the congregation at Manson, Calhoun Co., Iowa; which congregation was then organized by Bishop Sebastian Gerig of Wayland, Iowa, who had the bishop oversight of the Iowa division of the Western Amish Mennonite Conference.

In October, 1906, Bro. Roth was ordained to the office of bishop by bishops Joseph Schlegel of Milford, Nebr., and Jacob Birkey of Beemer, Nebr. Bro. Jacob Stauffer, a minister of the East Fairview congregation had also received some votes for bishop, but because Bro. Roth had the large majority of the votes, the bishops in charge, with the consent of the congregation ordained Bro. Roth without

the use of the lot. He was ordained to assist Bishop Joseph Schlegel, who had the bishop oversight of the Nebraska, Colorado, part of Kansas, and the East Fairview congregation, near Albany, Oreg., division of the Western Amish Mennonite Conference. Because of the large territory involved, Bro. Roth was away from home a considerable number of times serving in the work to which he had been called.

In the spring of 1910 a number of families left Nebraska seeking a location where there were better opportunities for acquiring homes. They moved to Tofield, Alberta, Canada. In August of 1910, Bishop Roth with his family also moved to the Tofield district, where he lived the remainder of his life. A congregation was organized in the Tofield district in October, 1910, under the Western Amish Mennonite Conference with Bro. Roth in charge as bishop. Owing, however, to the remoteness of the Tofield congregation from the main body of the Western Amish Mennonite Conference, and because of the

similarity of faith, Bro. Roth advocated the uniting of the Tofield congregation with the Alberta-Saskatchewan Mennonite Conference. This was accordingly done at the Alberta-Saskatchewan Mennonite Conference in session at the Mount View Mennonite Church near Aldersyde, Alta., in June 1915. Bro. Roth had previously received the consent for this union from both the Western Amish Mennonite Conference and the congregation at Tofield as well as the consent of the Alberta-Saskatchewan Mennonite Conference.

After this merger Bro. Roth was greatly used as moderator of conference and in various other capacities, especially as bishop in various problems throughout the churches, being especially gifted in the adjustment of such problems. Also because of his experience he was greatly used in an advisory capacity in the work of the church at large.

In October, 1937, Bro. Roth's health began to fail him. In March, 1938, he went to the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton, Alta., for an appendicitis operation which seemed to revive his health somewhat. He was able to attend the Alberta-Saskatchewan Mennonite Con-



Seated in the center are Nicholas E. Roth and his wife Amanda Bender. Their children are (L-R) Earl, Lydia (w. of Bishop John B. Stauffer), David, Alta, Lee, Pearl, and Katie.

ference held at Duchess, Alta., in July. A careful examination, however, on August 17, at Edmonton, revealed the serious nature of his illness, showing the development of an internal cancer. As time went on he began to suffer, but he bore his suffering patiently, and during his illness he at times was able to attend services at church and was at all times happy to have visitors. The last week of his life he failed rapidly and for some time previous he could not endure to lie down but sat on a chair or leaned upon a table. A few days previous to his passing, he was apparently permitted to see the River of Life which

he was soon to cross. On the afternoon of Saturday, January 14, 1939, at about 1:00 p.m. he passed to his eternal reward, aged 68 years, 4 months, and 29 days.

Funeral services were held at the home of his son-in-law, William Stauffer on Tuesday, January 17; conducted by Deacon J. E. Kauffman; text Psalm 90. At the Salem Mennonite Church, services were conducted by the brethren O. O. Hershberger, text II Timothy 4:6-8; Henry B. Ramer, text I Samuel 20:18; Isaac Miller, text John 14:1, and closing remarks by Milo D. Stutzman. Interment in the Salem Mennonite Cemetery.

time a meeting such as this has been held every week and God has blessed this community in many ways. During the year of 1948 John Roth and Alvin N. Roth and their families from Wellesley, Ont., and Lloyd Roth and Edward Roth and families from Baden, Ont., moved in. Jonas Wagler and Michael Roth and their families also from Baden and Ervin Zehr and family from Poole, Ont., had raised the number of Mennonite families in the Ailsa Craig area to twelve by the end of 1949.

Within a couple of weeks after the first few families had settled in the community all other work was laid aside and efforts were made to repair the church building, a new roof being the first accomplishment of this task. The church is a white brick building set amidst graceful maple trees. Finally, by the end of April, after much hard work painting walls, scrubbing, staining, and varnishing furnishings and floors the first Sunday-school services were held in the basement of the church. Thus the services continued for some time, with Bro. Wilfred Schlegel appointed as Sunday-school superintendent, and different ministers being supplied weekly by the other churches of the conference.

Immediate attention was next drawn to the main auditorium of the church. The redecoration involved many days of hard work and effort before the replastering, scrubbing, and redecoration of the interior was completed and ready for use. In June, 1948, the dedication services were held with Bro. Amos Swartzentruber, missionary on furlough from Argentina, as the guest speaker. The people of the community showed a great interest by their large attendance. Roy Stewart, a farmer in the district, gave a talk on the history of the church, which at one time belonged to the Presbyterians. It was also stated by a number of people that they were glad that the church was to be used again instead of being torn down as the previous plans had been. From that time on regular services have been held.

At first visiting ministers came to preach, but after consultation with the Mission Board it was decided that there should be a regular minister for this church. Bro. Wilfred Schlegel was ordained and installed into this office on March 6, 1949, at which time Bro. Alvin N. Roth succeeded him as Sunday-school superintendent. In September of the same year Bro. Michael Roth, deacon at Steinman Church at Baden, Ont., moved into the community and was accepted as deacon of the Nairn Mennonite Church.

A summer Bible school was started in July, 1948. This was something new for this community, but the people were interested and their co-operation was soon gained. A school has been held every year since that time and the attendance has steadily increased from an average attendance of 77 the first year to an average of 138 in 1954, in spite of other schools having been started since 1948, by other churches in the community.

The year 1950 seemed to be the time

## History of the Nairn Mennonite Church (Ailsa Craig, Ontario)

By ELAINE BENDER

In March, 1947, Alvin N. Roth from Wellesley, Ont., wrote to the Ontario Department of Agriculture asking if there were any neglected farming areas where the interest of farming could again be revived and carried on. There was a two-fold purpose in this action. The first and primary purpose for this was a missionary motive. The Amish Mennonite churches in Waterloo County and surrounding areas were increasing in membership and, therefore, there was a dire need for expansion. Second, the possibility of building up unused land, again making it arable, had an added attraction to the Mennonites.

In answer to Bro. Roth's letter East and West Williams Townships in Middlesex County were suggested and he was told to contact Mr. Riddell, the Agricultural Representative for Middlesex. Mr. Riddell then referred Bro. Roth to Mr. Alex M. Stewart, a prosperous farmer and seed grower in East Williams Township. Bro. Roth and a group of interested men went to see Mr. Stewart. While interviewing him they learned of a church which was for sale at Nairn. Nairn is situated about three miles south of Ailsa Craig, which is on Highway No. 7 and about twenty miles northwest of London, Ont. Sometime later Alvin N. Roth, Wilfred Schlegel, Floyd Ropp, Floyd Baechler, Elroy Swartzentruber, Lorne Bender, and a few of the members of the Ontario Amish Mennonite Mission Board further investigated the vicinity around the church. Moses O. Jantzi, president of the Mission Board at that time, was enthusiastic about the project. Many of the farms in this area had no buildings, had never been plowed, and were covered with thorn trees. On others the remains of a house or barn or maybe a grove of trees around the spot where a house had once stood were often the only indications that here were the sites of former build-

ings. Those buildings which still remained on some farms were not in a condition suitable for use in many instances. The reason for this neglect was not due to poor land nor poor farmers but because of their thriftiness and prosperity their children were educated and many followed their profession so when the parents died these farms were left to the professional people living elsewhere who rented them out to cattle men as pasture land; consequently the buildings were neglected. This community at one time shipped more cattle than any other center east of Calgary. So this land responded favorably to cultivation and most of it has been cropped the last few years.

However, it was not until January, 1948, that things began to happen. After many trips, of which several were disappointing and discouraging, Lorne Bender and Wilfred Schlegel both bought farms and Floyd Ropp rented a farm. Melvin Bender also bought a farm and Reuben Gingerich decided to rent a house for the time. But renting was difficult to do as people were skeptical of these "strange" folk. The Mission Board then bought the neglected church for a sum of fifteen hundred dollars. Floyd Ropp, Lorne Bender, Wilfred Schlegel, and Reuben Gingerich and their respective families from New Hamburg, Ont., were the first to take possession of their lands in late March, 1948. The few months after their arrival the Schlegels, Ropps, and Gingerichs had to make some adjustments in their family life, as they all had to live in one large, old house until their new homes were built. On April 15, 1948, Melvin Bender and family from New Hamburg, Ont., took up residence in their new abode. That evening the four families who were already settled planned a surprise welcome for the Benders and before leaving a prayer meeting was held asking God to guide and direct in the progress of this project. Since that

for further projects and expansion of this newly organized church. First, in March, 1950, the local congregation bought the church from the Mission Board. Second, in August, Craigholme, which is a ladies' rest home in Ailsa Craig, was bought. Bro. and Sister Simon Bender from Tavistock, Ont., were employed there as superintendent and matron. Third, in September, 1950, a property on Talbot Street in London, Ont., was bought to start a rescue mission. The purchase of a house in London was made possible because in the summer of 1949 the church rented one hundred acres of land. Much hard work was done in tilling the soil and preparing it for the sowing of wheat as the whole farm had been covered with thorn trees; about half a dozen tractors could be seen at work every evening. The operation of a rescue mission proved to be too large a project for such a small group, so the property was given to the Mission Board, and on January 29, 1951, the Goodwill Rescue Mission was opened with Bro. and Sister Alvin N. Roth as superintendent and matron. Fourth, a Sunday school was started at the Haig farm which is about thirty miles north of Ailsa Craig. This is a huge farm of 7,000 acres of land. The employees of the owner of this farm and their families live in houses scattered over this vast area. Most of their children do not go to church and it was felt that this was a great opportunity to witness for Christ. Since 1950 the trip is made every Sunday to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to these souls.

In the spring of 1952 Hopedale Farm, one mile south of Ailsa Craig, was purchased for the purpose of providing a home for the weary wanderers who had found their way to the Goodwill Rescue Mission and had no place to go from there. Bro. and Sister Simon Bender were placed in charge of this home while Bro. and Sister Lloyd Roth cared for the ladies at Craigholme. However, this home was open only until November, 1954, when the farm was turned over to the Mennonite Central Committee and is now to be used as a boys' center.

By the end of 1952 three more families made their home in this new Mennonite community. They were Alvin L. Roth and Jacob Roth and their families from New Hamburg, Ont., and Ervin Gingerich and family from Zurich, Ont. Today there are sixteen Mennonite families in this area and there is a church enrollment of about ninety including some men from skid row in London who have joined the church upon their confession of faith. Besides this there are a few people in the community who attend this church regularly and who have accepted Christ as their Saviour, but have not joined the church.

In the fall of 1953 the Nairn church purchased a house in London to accommodate the Sunday school which Bro. Alvin N. Roth had started at the rescue mission. Now regular services are held at this place with Sunday school on Sunday

morning, preaching in the evening and also midweek meetings with Bro. Roth in charge. John Wagler and family from Wellesley, Ont., and Alfred Ropp and family from Zurich, Ont., have moved into this house, part of which was purchased by Bro. Ropp. They help in the work in this place where some members have been contacted by means of the rescue mission.

On August 1, 1952, the hearts of loved ones were rent when David Zehr was fatally injured in an automobile and bicycle accident. We know not why this happened, but our trust in God was strengthened by this fatality. In May, 1953, the district was struck by a tornado and many homes and a few loved ones were lost. Again we were able to demonstrate the love of Christ to those in distress by helping to supply their many needs. And so almost seven years have passed since this project was first started. We have grown and our faith in God has been strengthened in a great way within these years. We can see God's merciful and loving hand over us and to Him we give all praise, thanks, and glory.

## The Duties of the Conference Historian

By N. P. Springer

*(Approved by the Historical committee of Mennonite General Conference, April 2, 1955)*

### I. Relation of the Conference Historian to the Archives of the Mennonite Church.

Inasmuch as Mennonite General Conference has designated the Archives of the Mennonite Church at Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, as its official depository for records of the Mennonite Church (its congregations, conferences, boards, committees, and other organizations) and the personal papers of ordained and lay leaders:

And, inasmuch as the problem of housing historical collections include precautions against the deteriorating effects of sudden changes of temperature and relative humidity, of sunlight, of dirt, of insects, and of rodents, and the loss of irreplaceable documents by theft or fire, calling for the constructions of special buildings or vaults:

And, inasmuch as the administration of historical collections requires personnel trained in the organization and administration of historical materials according to standard rules and procedures:

And, inasmuch as the scattering of materials in many places makes the finding and use of materials difficult for research scholars:

And, inasmuch as the Archives of the Mennonite Church is equipped to provide photocopy services to those who cannot come to Goshen to use materials there:

We, the Historical Committee of Men-

nonite General Conference urge strongly that our district conferences avail themselves of the opportunity to deposit their records in the Archives of the Mennonite Church, or at least to build archival or historical collections in their own districts.

In the light of this recommendation, we consider the duties of the conference historian to be:

1. To thoroughly acquaint himself with the history, purpose, and plan of operation of the Archives of the Mennonite Church. If possible, he should visit it to see it for himself. If this is not possible, he should write to the Archivist requesting such bulletins published by the Archives as will best acquaint him with the Archives:

2. To serve as a liaison agent between the Archives of the Mennonite Church and his district conference:

a. By interpreting the purpose and work of the Archives to the constituency within his own district;

b. By scouting his district for materials old and new, which should be deposited in the Archives;

c. By acquainting his constituency with the records retention and disposal policies officially adopted by the General Council of Mennonite General Conference and encouraging their adoption and use by the organizations of his district conference and its members congregations;

d. By fostering historical interest within the local congregations so as to reduce the loss sustained through housecleaning of attics and the discarding of German materials and other items which still have value historically;

e. By encouraging those who have records which should be deposited in the Archives to do so;

f. By collecting such items as printed programs, reports, constitutions, and clippings for transferral to the Archives;

g. By assisting persons from his constituency who may have problems relating to the use of the records in the Archives;

3. To report to the annual meeting of his local conference information regarding the development and use of the Archives of the Mennonite Church.

### II. Relation to the Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen College.

Since Goshen College has built a large research collection of non-archival materials related to Mennonite History, known as the Mennonite Historical Library, which is recognized among research scholars as a comprehensive collection where they may expect to find the things they need for research in any area of Mennonite history, which is under the direction of persons trained in library science, and which circulates books by mail as well as to persons who come to the library, we urge that conference historians co-operate with the Mennonite Historical Library in its attempts to fill the gaps in the collections, particularly in regard to rare books,



i.e., early American imprints in the German language, and materials published locally, either by conference, by congregation, or privately.

### III. Relation to His Own Conference District.

Apart from these suggested relations of the conference historian to the Archives of the Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Historical Library of Goshen College, we consider it the responsibility of the conference historian:

1. To keep an inventory of records retained in the files of his district conference and its member congregations;

2. To record current events of historical interest within his own conference district, reporting them to the conference in its annual session as desired and to the church at large through periodicals;

3. To be ready to give counsel and aid to those who are planning special historical observances;

4. To endeavor to attend special meetings such as anniversaries, ordinations, dedications, etc., to record and summarize the programs and to report them through appropriate channels;

5. To engage in actual research and collection of materials to the extent that his time and interests allow, and to put these materials into shape for deposit with the Archives or the Mennonite Historical Library, as the case may be. Examples might be cemetery records, genealogical materials, and other items of local historical significance.

### IV. Relation to Local Collections.

Since it is conceivable that distance from Goshen, international boundaries, and other factors might make the establishment of some local archives and historical collections advisable, the conference historian shall have primary responsibility to aid in the development of such local collections. His responsibility to the central collections shall continue as outlined above, keeping in mind that materials of church-wide interest belong in the central Archives rather than in the regional archives.

If such local collections are established, the conference historian should thoroughly acquaint himself with the distinctions in nature and function between archives, research libraries, and museum collections (which may contain some of the same types of materials ordinarily found in archives and research libraries). He shall insist that the local collection be organized in accordance with standard procedures of cataloging and classification, and that the person in charge should have professional training. If a person with professional training cannot be secured, the minimum requirement should be that the person in charge should spend a sufficiently long period of orientation with trained persons to enable him to proceed

with his work in a semiprofessional manner. It would seem advisable that any persons assigned responsibility in organizing collections should spend a minimum of one week at the central Archives for a period of orientation.

### V. Relation to the Historical Committee of Mennonite General Conference.

The conference historian shall be considered an associate, nonvoting member of the Historical Committee of Mennonite General Conference, entitled to attend its meetings, to receive copies of its minutes, and to be placed on the mailing list for bulletins which may be published by the Archives of the Mennonite Church.

## Gratz Book of Common Family Names

BY JOHN UMBLE

Does your surname appear in the following list? If so, you undoubtedly are the descendant of one of the hardy pioneers who emigrated from Alsace, Switzerland, or the Palatinate to escape religious persecution and to improve their economic status.

You can learn the details of this thrilling story of your ancestors by reading "Bernese Anabaptists and Their American Descendants," written by Dr. Delbert Gratz, librarian at Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio, and published by Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa.

The list below presents the names of French, German, and Swiss who braved the rigors and discomforts of early ocean travel for the sake of religious freedom and economic opportunity. The foreign name of the immigrant appears first, followed by its present American equivalent.

Aebersold—Ebersole; Aeby or Ewy—Eby; Amstutz—Amstutz; Aeschlimann—Ashliman or Eshleman; Augsburg—Augsburger or Augspurger.

Bachmann—Bachman; Baumann—Bauman; Beck or Bek; Beck; Beer—Beer, Bare, Bair, or Baer.

Berger or Buerger—Berger; Blaser—Blosser; Blauch—Blough; Boesiger—Baysinger; Brechbiel—Breckbill; Broeniman—Brenneman.

Christener—Chris(t)ner; Friedrich—Frederick; Dreyer—Troyer.

Gaeumann—Gelman, Gayman; Geiger—Geiger; Gillomen—Gilliom; Guth—Good;

Habegger—Habegger; Hilti—Hilty; Hochstetler—Hostetler; Ioder or Jotter—Yoder; Jordi—Yordy.

Kauffmann—Kaufman, Coffman; Koenig—King; Kolb—Kolb, Kalb, Kulp or Culp; Kraewenbuehl—Krehbiel, Krebill, Grabill; Kropf—Kropf, Krupp.

Lehmann—Lehman, Lahman, Layman; Leichti—Liechty, Leichy; Lerch—Lerch, Lark; Luethi—Leedy; Luginbuehl—Luginbill, Luginbill.

Marti—Martin; Maurer—Maurer, Mowrer; Meyer—Meyer, Moyer; Moser—Moser, Musser; Mosimann—Moseman; Mueller—Miller; Muezzelmann—Musselmann.

Neuenschwander—Niswander; Oeberli

—Eberly; Reusser—Risser; Rich—Rich; Ritschard—Richard; Roth—Roth.

Saam—Shaum; Schenk—Shenk, Shank; Schmucker—Smucker, Smoker; Schrag—Shrock; Sprunger—Sprunger, Springer; Schuhmacher—Shoemaker; Sommer—Sommer, Summer.

Schneider—Snyder; Stalder—Stalter; Stucki—Stuckey; Staeli—Stahley, Staley; Stauffer—Stauffer, Stover, Stofer; Steiner—Steiner, Stoner; Stauder—Stouder.

Thueller—Diller; Thut—Thut; Truesel—Trissel; Tschantz—Shantz, Johns; Ummel—Ummel, Umble.

Von Gunten—Gunden; Waelti—Weldy; Weber—Weaver; Wenger—Wenger; Wiedmer—Widmer, Witmer; Zaug, Zoug, or Zough—Zug, Zook.

### Born in Ohio

Dr. Gratz has unusual qualifications for such a task as his research in Anabaptist history. He was reared in the strong Swiss Mennonite settlement at Bluffton, Ohio, and received his bachelor's degree from Bluffton College. The subject of his master's thesis at Ohio State University (1945) was "A History of the Swiss Brethren (Mennonites) Who Migrated from Switzerland to America from 1817 to 1860."

These studies had the effect of sharpening his interest in the larger field of German and Swiss emigration to America. A year as research assistant at Mennonite Central Committee headquarters in Akron, Pa., and two years as a relief worker in Germany (October 1946 to October 1948) gave him further acquaintance in the general area of Mennonite life and culture.

### Studied at Berne

These experiences afforded an excellent background for his study at the University of Berne during the next year and a half. Here he had access to the Bernese State Archives and to various archives in the canton of Bern. In this original setting of the court trials, persecutions, economic hardships and religious life of the Brethren he wrote his book.

—Adapted from *Mennonite Weekly Review*.

